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Chapter I

THE COUNTRY OF THE KHOISAN

By the year 1652, when the establishment of the pioneer Dutch settlement at Table Bay laid the foundations for the present political dominance of the white man in the country, Africa south of the Zambesi River was already inhabited by a considerable number of different native peoples. On the basis of racial, linguistic and cultural distinctions, these native inhabitants are customarily classified into four separate groups, known respectively as the Bushmen, the Hottentots, the Bergdama, and the Bantu.

The Bushmen, at one time spread over almost the whole of South Africa, are to-day confined principally to the Central and Northern Kalahari Desert and adjacent districts. They are a short, brownish-yellow people, with certain peculiar and distinctive racial characteristics; they all speak languages of a uniform and easily recognizable type, phonetically remarkable especially for the great prevalence of "click" consonants; and they live in small nomadic bands which lead a purely hunting and collecting existence, practising neither agriculture nor pastoralism.

The Hottentots formerly occupied most of the western half of the region, but are now found chiefly in the southern parts of South-West Africa. They are closely allied to the Bushmen in race, and their languages are of a somewhat similar type, although in both respects certain differences are also observable. They are, however, a predominantly pastoral people, keeping cattle and sheep, and live in larger communities with a more complex system of social organization.

The Bergdama, also inhabiting South-West Africa, are racially a true negro people, different in appearance from both the Bushmen and the Hottentots. They all, however, speak the language of the Nama division of Hottentots, to whom they have long been in subjection. Like the Bushmen they live in very small nomadic groups and derive their subsistence primarily from hunting and collecting, although some of them also keep goats.

The Bantu, finally, although historically the most recent native people settling in South Africa, are now spread over the whole country

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Identification

The Nama (Naman, Namaqua) are a major division of the Hottentot nation. They originally numbered about 20,000. They include the following tribes: Gei //khauan, !gami /nun, //haboben, !khara Gei Khoin, //khau /goan, //o Gein, /aunin or !naranin, all of whom constitute the Great Namaqua, and also the Little Namaqua tribes. The Nama numbered 24,000 in 1946.

Basic Economy

Primarily pastoral. No agriculture. Hunting is important, and gathering and fishing fairly so. Cattle, sheep, and some goats are herded, and dogs kept. Milk and game are the staple foods.

Sex Division of Labor

Men hunt. Women milk animals (unlike Bantu) and gather. Herding done mainly by boys and servants.

Property

Main wealth in cattle and sheep. Land is communally owned by the local group. Private property exists in livestock, movables, wells dug, and wild beehives discovered.

Livestock are inherited by ElSo; other property equally by children of both sexes.

Social Stratification

No true slavery. War captives or rescued fugitives were kept as servants, earning their subsistence in return for their labor, but were allowed to leave if they wished. Hired servants were paid by a share of the increase.

Marriage

The groom provides several cattle; some are slaughtered for the wedding feast, some given as presents (apparently not a true bride-price) to his parents-in-law, who give some in return as a dowry for the bride. Postmarital bride-service occurs during the period of initial matrilocal residence.

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Polygyny is permitted but not common. Monogamy is the norm. In a polygynous family each wife normally has her own hut.

Family

The nuclear family is the norm--occupying one hut (others in case of polygynous wives). No extended family organization, though patrilineally related men tended to camp nearby.

Residence

Matripatrilocal residence is the norm--matrilocal till birth of first child, then usually patrilocal in the camp of HuFa. Occasional matrilocal exceptions.

Kin Groups and Exogamy

Local exogamy is the norm.

Bilateral extension is absent. Marriage with either cross-cousin is permitted, but is forbidden with parallel cousins.

Exogamous patrilineal sibs, divided into lineages. They share a marked fissive tendency.

Kinship Terminology

Fa, FaBr--//gun. Mo, MoSi--//gus. So, BrSo--oab. Da, SiDa--oas. Br--gab, Si, Br--gas. Br and Si often modified by adjectives "big" and "young" to indicate age distinctions. The above three pairs of terms differ internally only by sex gender endings.

MoBr--//naob. FaSi called "big Mo" or by special age-distinguishing terms. Avuncular and nepotic terminology is bifurcate merging in type.

Iroquois cousin terminology. Sibling terms are used for parallel cousins.

Settlement Pattern

Migratory bands.. Camps of mat-covered, dome-shaped huts arranged in a circle.

Community Organization

Patri-sibs (or parts thereof) are localized as patrilocal clan-communities.

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Local Government

Clan chief or headman, succeeded by ElSo (then Br or BrSo); council of adult males.

State

Twelve sub-tribes, each with a chief, the headman of the senior clan. Other clan chiefs formed a council. Little political cohesion, but often united for war.

Warfare

Intertribal warfare and intra-tribal clan feuds common.

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Environment and Culture

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The possibilities of exploitation this region offers to people lacking the highly-developed technical equipment of modern European civilization vary considerably. The ways in which the Bushmen and Hottentots utilize the natural resources of their surroundings will be discussed in some detail in later chapters. Here a rapid survey may be made of the factors conditioning the distribution and mode of life generally of the natives inhabiting the country.[1]

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The most important consideration naturally is water. Animal and plant life are there in sufficient quantity to support human existence, provided a supply of water is near. Man in his primitive condition is dependent entirely on surface water for the satisfaction of his needs, for he has not the means now possessed by civilized man for getting at the water in the depths below. The amount of surface water therefore determines the density of population in any one area, and the water available in a given area, together with the density of the vegetation, determines the number and size of the settlements in that area.

The character of the country, moreover, limits at once the types of culture that can become indigenous there. South Africa even under modern conditions can only carry on agriculture in certain parts, and most of the country could never support a primitive population of pure agriculturists. It is only in the well-watered districts to the north and east and along the south coast that native agriculture has been developed to any extent. On the other hand, there is an abundant fauna and a sufficiency of vegetable life to afford good subsistence to men. The type of culture then that we would *a priori* expect to find here would be one based largely on hunting and collecting. This is exactly what we do find. The abundance of game formerly existing in South Africa makes it readily comprehensible that hunting at one time played a great role in all parts of the country, and therefore that hunting peoples were distributed all over its surface. All the native peoples of South Africa, whatever other means of subsistence they have, rely to some extent at least for food on the products of the chase and on the edible bulbs and roots of the veld.

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A country, however, which can support great numbers of buck

[1] For special discussions of the South African environment in relation to man, cf. Passarge, *op. cit.*, pp. 162–75; *idem*, "Die Grundlinien im ethnographischen Bilde der Kalahari-Region," *Z. Ges. Erdk. Berlin*, 1905, pp. 20–36, 68–88; (Mrs.) A. W. Hoernlé, "South-West Africa as a Primitive Culture Area," *S. Afr. Geog. J.*, vi (1923), pp. 14–28.

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and other grass and herb-eating animals will also support other species of these animals, provided that conditions such as the absence of the tsetse fly and other pests are favourable. Hence we also find pastoral tribes, who have come in from other regions bringing with them great herds of cattle and immense flocks of sheep and goats. One important point must, however, be noticed. Country which, under modern farming conditions, will only carry a small herd of cattle, sheep, and goats, used formerly to carry large herds of well-fed antelopes and zebras. The explanation is that each wild species is specially adapted to living on certain bushes or plants, and that many natural foodstuffs useless to farm stock were made use of by one species or another of wild game. It must also be remembered that the wild game was not restricted by farm boundaries; it was free to shift its ground according to the seasons and the supplies of food and water. For the same reasons a nomadic life was imposed on the native tribes keeping domestic animals, although nowadays with the extension of the European settlements the areas over which free movement is possible have become greatly restricted.

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Viewed in this light, the natural regions of South Africa which have been described above are seen to differ widely in their value for culture. Certain parts of the country, such as the Namib desert strip and the interior of Bushmanland, are largely uninhabitable. The rainfall in both is exceedingly slight, and there is practically no surface water all the year round. In parts of the Namib, however, the river-courses from the mountains of the South-West African plateau periodically carry water, which is dammed up in a few places by rocky outcrops in the river beds, and above all there is the */naras* melon, whose fruit is sufficiently succulent to provide a substitute for water. Agriculture is completely out of the question. The thin scattered population which the region can support is forced to lead a nomadic hunting life, although in the east, towards the borders of the plateau, the grass which flourishes during the rainy season occasionally permits of pastoralism.

The greater part of the Middle and Southern Kalahari lacks surface water during the dry season only. The water supply at other times is generally sufficient to permit of temporary settlements, although the porous sand covering of the surface absorbs all the rainfall, so that except in the pans and other waterholes the standing water rapidly disappears. The region is sparsely inhabited, and mostly by nomadic peoples. Agriculture is again impossible, save in a few tracts to the

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east, where the soil is more favourable, but the rainfall is too uncertain to enable grain to be grown with a reasonable prospect of success. The abundance of grass in many parts, especially during the rainy season, affords good pasture to cattle, but the region is above all an excellent hunting ground, and formerly at least it was extraordinarily rich in game. Hence its inhabitants are in the first place hunting peoples, and their life is conditioned by the movements of the game. At the beginning of the rainy season the animals wander out of the permanently-watered regions encircling the desert into its sandy plains, where water is found only in pans, pools, and waterholes. The hunters follow them. As the dry season sets in and the water in the pans begins to shrink, part of the game returns to the watered regions, part of it, however, continues to live in the plains on the *tsama* melons and other succulent plants—and the hunters do the same.

In the well-watered Northern Kalahari three great streams, the Okavango, Kwando, and Zambesi, overflow on to the flat land, in some parts continuously, in others periodically, and thus give rise to an extensive region of swamps. This marshy region is excellent hunting and fishing ground. Its population, more numerous and densely settled than in the rest of the Kalahari, is therefore primarily concerned with these two pursuits. The natives indeed are actually forced to resort in part to fishing, since for motives of security they live mainly on the small islands between the swamps and the rivers. The periodic rise of the rivers annually floods wide stretches of the country, resulting in displacements and wanderings of the game. Consequently, the natives also must roam, partly because their habitations are flooded out, partly because they must follow the animals. Both agriculture and pastoralism are also carried out in parts of the country. The cattle pasture in the sandveld away from the swamps, while the marshy region can only be used for the cultivation of crops, since for wide stretches it is infested by the tsetse.

The upland regions encircling the Kalahari basin on the south-east, south, and west, have for the most part a scanty rainfall. The permanent settlement of this belt during the dry season is therefore restricted to the scattered waterholes, which occur in river beds, on mountain slopes or in depressions on the hard soil. Waterless stretches from 40 to 100 miles in extent are no rarity, so that the settlements are frequently distributed far apart over the land. Here, as in other regions of South Africa, hunting must depend on the movements of

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the game. In the more arid parts the animals in the dry season concentrate in vast numbers about the rivers and waterholes and pans, to disperse widely as soon as the rains make life possible elsewhere. The same features of alternate concentration and dispersal can be observed in the life of the purely hunting tribes. The pastoral resources are on the whole excellent, there being no lack of grass or edible shrubs even during the dry season, and consequently cattle-keeping peoples are able to lead a favoured existence in these uplands. Agriculture is also practised to some extent, but is confined to the scattered alluvial tracts. As a means of subsistence it is rendered precarious by the frequent droughts which characterize the region. These often exercise a harmful effect on pastoralism as well, partly because of the ensuing lack of water, but mainly because the pasture is completely destroyed in many parts of the country. The plateaus of the Orange Free State, Cape Province, and Southern Bechuanaland are especially exposed to such catastrophes, but they are often enough marked in South-West Africa also, particularly in Great Namaqualand.

Further east and along the south coast the rainfall is high enough to place cultivation on a safe footing, while the country, where it is not covered with bush or forest, is composed of extensive grass flats which can be used as pasture land. Consequently, both agriculture and pastoralism are equally developed, the former being carried out on a far greater scale than in other parts of South Africa. Here, therefore, we find the most thickly settled zones, and the population is mainly sedentary, even although the pastoral tribes must still to some extent lead a nomadic life.

Migration Routes

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The geographical situation of South Africa has an obvious bearing upon the racial history of the country. Cut off by vast uninterrupted stretches of water from ready access on the west, south, and east, its most direct link with other regions is overland to the north. In the north-west the great forest regions of the Congo impose an effective barrier upon extensive human migrations, so that it is principally from the north-east that invading peoples have been able to enter the country.[1] The East African highlands are connected with the south by a favourable route passing between the escarpments in the east with their sharp descent to the fertile but fever-stricken coastlands,

[1] Cf. Passarge, *Z. Ges. Erdk. Berlin*, 1905, pp. 32–3; *idem*, *Südafrika*, pp. 163–7.

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Hottentots. The nature of the relationship between these two peoples has given rise to much discussion. They are unquestionably allied in race, and, indeed, in appearance and bodily characters resemble each other so closely as to have often been confused. There are certain features, such as stature and the shape of the head, in which the Hottentots are actually found to differ somewhat from the Cape Bushmen, but differences of the same nature exist even between the Northern Bushmen and those of the Cape.

The two peoples also have much in common in language. Their speech has the same phonetic basis, characterized especially by the occurrence of several "click" consonants; many roots in the Hottentot languages are found with the same meanings in various Bushman languages; while in grammatical processes and categories there is also a fundamental correspondence, more particularly between the Hottentot and the Central Bushman languages. At the same time, the Hottentot languages have certain grammatical features, such as sex-gender, sex-denoting particles and a dual number, which do not occur in any of the Bushman languages save that of the Naron.

In culture the differences are more readily apparent. While the Bushmen are hunters and collectors only, the Hottentots in addition are a pastoral people, with herds of long-horned straight-backed cattle and flocks of fat-tailed hairy sheep. They were also able to smelt metal ores for the manufacture of their implements, weapons, and ornaments, while the Bushmen have never learned to do so and still obtain whatever iron they use by barter from their more advanced neighbours. The Hottentots, again, do not appear ever to have possessed the art of painting and engraving on rock, so remarkable a feature in the culture of the Southern Bushmen; but, then, it should be noted, there is no direct evidence either that the Northern Bushmen were acquainted with this art. In social organization, habits, and customs there are likewise many far-reaching differences, but at the same time, as we shall see, the similarities in some respects are by no means insignificant. In religion, on the other hand, the similarities are occasionally very striking, although here again there are also important differences of detail.

All these points, both of resemblance and of difference, will be analysed below and discussed more in detail. It must here be mentioned, however, that the common elements indicated are on the whole significant enough to warrant the conclusion that the Hottentots are basically of the same racial stock as the Bushmen, and

Identification

The Cape Hottentot, with whom are here also grouped the East Hottentot about whom practically nothing is known, speak a language of the Khoisan or Click stock. Since it is extinct, its exact relationship to Nama is not known, but doubtless both belong to the Central Bushman branch. The East Hottentot include the Damaqua, Gonaqua, and Inqua tribes; the Cape Hottentot the Goringhaiqua (Goringhaikona), Kora (Gorachouqua, later the Korana), Kochoqua, Little Grigriqua (Chariguriqua), Great Grigriqua, Chainoqua, Hessequa, Hancumqua, Attaqua, and Outeniqua.

Basic Economy

Primarily pastoral. Herding of long-horned cattle and fat-tailed sheep is followed in importance by gathering, then hunting. Fishing is reported for only one coast-dwelling tribe. Agriculture is lacking. Schapera (1930) reports dogs and goats, as well as cattle and sheep. Milk and meat are the staple foods.

Sex Division of Labor

The men herd and hunt. The women milk. Both sexes gather.

Property

Livestock are the chief wealth. Women as well as men own cattle. Land is communally owned by local groups.

Inheritance is patrilinea--by ElSo, in default thereof by Br or BrSo.

Social Stratification

Slavery is not practiced. There are wealth distinctions.

Marriage

A true bride-price is lacking, but marriage involves a token gift of one or two animals which are slaughtered for the wedding feast.

Polygyny is permitted but is relatively infrequent, being practiced mainly by wealthy men. The first wife is chief wife, and each wife has her own hut.

Family

The residential unit is the nuclear or polygynous families, although

patrilocal extended families are a possibility--rather more likely than among the Nama.

Residence

The patrilocal rule prevails. Initial matrilocal residence as among the Nama, though not reported, possibly exists. Children remain with their parents until marriage.

Kin Groups and Exogamy

One source reports that marriage with any consanguineal relative is forbidden.

Exogamous patri-sibs are highly probable.

Settlement Pattern

The local group is a migratory band. The main camp, where the older people remain and to which the smaller nomadic groups return from time to time, is a great circle of huts surrounded by a thorn fence. The dwellings were presumably hemispherical mat-covered lodges like those of the Nama.

Community Organization

The community is presumably a patri-clan as among the Nama. Age-grades are lacking.

Local Government

Each band has a hereditary headman, who is assisted by a council of elders. Succession is patrilineal--often by ElSo.

State

Though local groups are largely autonomous, they are grouped into tribal aggregations, each with a hereditary chief (succeeded by ElSo) and a council of local headmen. Political cohesion, however, is minimal.

Warfare

There are perpetual feuds or petty wars.

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